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Washington, DC – On Friday, Rep. Steve Israel (D – New York) announced new legislation to assess and improve election systems throughout the country. The American Democracy Index Act (H.R.4033) seeks to improve election administration throughout the United States by ranking states on election performance and comparing best and worst practices.

“For too many Americans, our election system is marred by long lines, lost ballots and controversial recounts. Our elections should be conducted in a way that makes Americans want to vote. It should be easy, expedient and accurate. The American Democracy Index will tell us where we’re succeeding and where we’re failing so that we can make improvements based on what works,” said Rep. Israel.

“The American election system remains deeply flawed, even after the debacle of 2000 and the Help America Vote Act that followed. Fixing the system requires real knowledge about what is working and what isn’t,” said Norm Ornstein, American Enterprise Institute scholar and Co-Director of the AEI-Brookings Election Reform Project. “A great first step would be a Democracy Index that requires good data from all states and localities to analyze the problems, and an ability to rank jurisdictions according to whether they are serving democracy by running elections well, or falling short of their peers and of any reasonable standards. Steve Israel has been a leader in pushing for ways to make the American election system the model it should be; this bill is another solid step in that direction.”

“Access to accurate information is the first requirement of good policy-making,” said Trevor Potter, a former Republican Chairman of the Federal Election Commission who now heads the non-partisan Campaign Legal Center. “This bill will mandate that the government obtain and publish the best information that can be gathered about the functioning of our election system--and every political party should agree that is a very good and important thing to do.”

During the 2000 election, between 1.5 and 3 million votes were lost because of the registration process. According to the 2000 U.S. Census, about 1 million registered voters said they did not vote because polling lines were too long or polling hours were too short. Following the 2004 presidential election, 43 percent of local officials surveyed reported that an electronic voting system had malfunctioned.

The American Democracy Index Act requires that the Election Assistance Commission contract with an entity to collect voter data and publish the American Democracy Index for the federal election cycle of 2012. The American Democracy Index (ADI) will present voter and election administration data on a state-by-state basis in a manner designed to demonstrate the effectiveness of election administration practices. States will be ranked according to criteria established by an independent advisory board of election administration experts in consultation with the Election Assistance Commission. The legislation also establishes a pilot program for the 2010 federal election cycle to create an index that ranks localities within five states to measure the effectiveness of their election administration.

The concept is based on a proposal that Yale Law School Professor Heather Gerken wrote about in her book, *The Democracy Index: Why Our Election System Is Failing and How to Fix It*. She argues that a “Democracy Index” – a public ranking of election performances around the country – would encourage states to take real steps to make voting easier.

The bill also authorizes funding to assist states with reporting requirements.

Rep. Israel is a leader in the House of Representatives on election reform. In the 110th and 111th Congress, he introduced the Weekend Voting Act which seeks to move Election Day from Tuesday to the weekend in an effort to increase voter participation.

Rep. Israel serves on the House Appropriations Committee.